'Reflections on the Role of a Vice-Chancellor'

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I am glad of the opportunity provided by one of the themes of this Conference to bring together some thoughts and observations about the role of the contemporary vice-chancellor. They are thoughts which have been collected over 25 years, since I first was in a position to observe a vice-chancellor closely. In the last seven years they have considerably increased in number, for in that time I have occupied the role myself. The role of vice-chancellor is very probably a puzzle to all who occupy it; it certainly has been to me, and the urge to try and explore the role from the inside is irresistible, given my background as a historian, political scientist and *quondam* novelist.

I need to say at once that this is not a paper written in any real sense from inside political science. Ten years have passed since I was able to devote real time to my own discipline. I am no longer up to date in the directions the discipline has been taking, and only passingly aware of the debates and the new voices. I am conscious, too, that like my distinguished contemporaries in the discipline, Tony Staley and Neal Blewett, who both spoke to APSA Conferences on the relevance of political science to a ministerial and representative life, I have not found political science able to provide answers as to what to do next or, in any explicit sense, how to do anything. But it is probably true that I see the role of vice-chancellor as fundamentally a political one because I have been a political scientist, and my view of what universities are for, and how they should be funded, structured, organised and led, is fundamentally affected by my having been a political scientist (and historian, which is also important). It is plain to me that some of my colleagues, vice-chancellors in other universities, see things rather differently. That does not make them necessarily worse in the role.

Vice-chancellors have been rather coy about their work. Few of the 110 or so present or past Australian vice-chancellors have written about it either after or during the event. R. B. Madgwick, J. P. Baxter and A. G. Mitchell each contributed reflective pieces to the April 1968 number of *The Australian University*, but only Madgwick's effort is at all personal. Louis Matheson allows you to discern something of his role at Monash in his autobiography *Still Learning* (1980), and Zelman Cowen did something similar in .... The best Australian example is A. P. Rowe's *If the Gown Fits* (Melbourne, 1960), an often sad but always pointed account of the difficulties of being the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide in the 1950s. Many of the things that he says about the culture of academic life ring very true to me in the late 1990s. To the best of my knowledge no Australian vice-chancellor other than Madgwick has analysed in print what he or she does, and the American examples I have seen are couched more in the DIY textbook mode than serious analysis from any kind of social science perspective. Perhaps it is

because as CEOs we are all amateurs. None of the current vice-chancellors has an MBA or was dean of a faculty of business or management, and our backgrounds are overwhelmingly academic. Nonetheless, the general reticence is odd. I think that much the same could be said of British vice-chancellors. Noel Annan talked about the University of London from the perspective of the University's Vice-Chancellor, and I remember it (an old OU video whose title I cannot remember) for the wry comment that he always seemed to rewriting Magna Carta with the rebellious barons of his domain. I have written one piece (mostly) about how universities choose vice-chancellors (Aitkin, 1994). There are a few university histories through which you can learn something of the role of its vice-chancellor(s), but more through inference than through anything else.

Since what follows in this paper is a great variety of comments and observations about universities, vice-chancellorial duties and the world we live in, it is probably useful to know just a little about where I come from. I am now 60 years old, and have two degrees with history as their focus followed by a PhD in political science. I know four Australian universities well though over different times (UNE, 1954-60; ANU, 1961-4, 1965-71, 1980-88; Macquarie University, 1972-9; University of Canberra, 1991-present), and I have spent serious periods of time at Oxford University, the University of London and the University of Michigan. I spent ten years in the research granting business, including five years as Chairman of the Australian Research Grants Committee and its successor, the Australian Research Council. Those years gave me an aversion to most of the rhetoric about the importance of research in universities, together with a great urge to get academics to recognise that they were spending other people's money, and that they needed to be able to justify that expenditure. My strong disciplinary interest has been Australian government and politics, approached from historical, institutional and behavioural perspectives. In the last twenty years I have developed a participant's interest in public policy questions, especially those to do with higher education and research, and even more recently, those to do with national identity and nation-building. I have been a vice-chancellor for nearly seven years, and am in my second term in the same institution.

That last qualification makes me decently aged in the role, and able to write a paper like this with some confidence. Of the 36 vice-chancellors in what used to be called the unified national system, I am the ninth most senior in length of service. That tells you something about the job. For those who are interested in the demographics of vice-chancellors, David Sloper's background paper (Sloper, 1994) in *The Modern Vice-Chancellor* is a good quarry for information. But, as my last little remark makes clear, such information is likely to go out of date very quickly: in the last twelve months or so new vice-chancellors have been appointed to Bond, Newcastle, New England, Australian Catholic, Monash, South Australia, Edith Cowan, Curtin, Western Australia and James Cook. Such changes affect averages very quickly, and sometimes quite profoundly. There were only two women as vice-chancellors a couple of years ago. Now there are six. Most contemporary vice-chancellors have seven-year terms; most of them only experience one term; a few serve two or more; several have become 'professional' vice-chancellors, going from place to place (the current record is

three); three have become 'experts', called out of retirement to fill in while major changes are brought about and a new VC is appointed.

I have written briefly about 'role', 'task', 'setting', 'context', and 'timing' in the paper already mentioned, and will not repeat much of that here. Like Madgwick, who was my vice-chancellor when I was an undergraduate, I think universities 'are important and exciting places, and to be the vice-chancellor of one of them is an immense privilege which not all the problems and frustrations of the job can deny'. (Madgwick, 1968, 14) He would probably agree with me when I say that I find the job at once exhilarating, creative, stimulating, tiring, depressing and despairing. It is never ever dull. Nothing a vice-chancellor does is unimportant to everyone in his or her domain, and the tiniest thing one is asked to do is desperately important to someone. For this reason, being a vice-chancellorship is a humbling experience: you see the great variety of creativity and talent on your campus as closely as anyone can, and you see more of it than anyone else. The result is that you are filled with pride that you are responsible for such an assemblage of virtue, and your sense of your own achievements and qualities diminishes to its proper level.

That pushes me to say something about my University. It is what the last Neanderthals in Australian society inaccurately describe as a 'Dawkins university', a classification that ignores the fact that only 5 of the 36 public universities escaped being altered during John Dawkins's period as Minister. It is the 8th smallest of the 36, with 9000 students (which makes it more than twice as large, however, as the University of Sydney was when I was an undergraduate), on one campus in the national capital. It is more like Macquarie than it is like either UNE or ANU, but while it is not remarkable in any public way, its staff are as a group more laterally talented and more creative than those I remember in my earlier universities, and their response time is very quick in comparison. I think they possessed these attributes before my arrival, and if I am right they flow from the University's pre-occupation with teaching and learning for the professions, on the one hand, and with applied research and consultancy, on the other hand. The late Joe Tanenhaus, an old friend of mine, in a memorable article once categorised academics as either 'discipline-oriented' or 'college-oriented': people who see themselves first and foremost as 'physicists' or 'economists' belong to the first group, while those who see themselves first and foremost as members of this university or that one belong to the second. (Tanenhaus and   , 196) A lot follows from such sense of belonging. I am profoundly grateful that I am the Vice-Chancellor of a fine group of 'college-oriented' academics, who are fond of their University, intensely loyal to it, and quick to see new things that can be done for, through or with it. It is obvious that many of my colleagues, especially those in the older universities, have to deal with staff who are predominantly 'discipline-oriented', some of whom plainly think that they have done the university a real service by deigning to become a member of its staff. I have mercifully few people like that.

In the remainder of this paper I will, following Jane Austen's wise advice to intending writers, talk only about what I know. I will first of all discuss what I actually do with my time, and then use some subject headings from Carl Friedrich's *Man and His Government* (1963), a book around which I once designed a first year Politics course, to look at universities and the wider job

the vice-chancellor does. I am sure that much of what I will say could be generalised to other universities, but whether or not that is so can only be stated confidently by others.

Time Allocation

Because I puzzle about what I do and why I do it, and because I am fond of counting, I kept a record of the use of time in my first five years. I gave that activity away when it became plain that one year was much like the last, always allowing for the big things like enterprise bargains or changes in governments. There are some obvious categories of time use. First, there is time at the desk, and time away from it. Second, there are the meetings that are the daily bread of a vice-chancellor's life. Like it or not, you have to attend, chair and participate in dozens of meetings. Universities are specially given to meetings, which are collegial life in action. Unlike most of the other participants in university meetings, the vice-chanellor can never be uninterested in what is going on, or drift off into reverie. There are meetings held within the university, meetings held outside it which are to do with the university, or with higher education, or with research, or with some important aspect of university life, and meetings which are about the community in which the university is involved. Meetings are rarely over quickly, and are usually preceded by and followed by briefings, debriefings and action.

Third, there are appointments with individuals or groups, most of them members of the university, staff or students, but some from outside; such appointments usually take place in my office, but naturally enough some take place in other people's offices. In this area I have no pride: I will meet anyone anywhere if it seems important to have the meeting. Fourth, there are the speeches and addresses that the vice-chancellor makes, some of them formal and requiring prepared texts (graduation addresses, for example or speeches to plenary bodies), others informal. Fifth, there are the functions that the vice-chancellor is asked to open, close, introduce the guest speaker at, move the vote of thanks at, or intervene to say something that somebody thinks is important at (most of these take place at the university), or is asked to attend and thereby represent the university (and often 'say a few words'). The latter are usually outside the university.

Sixth, there is the eating and drinking that seem indispensable elements in the transaction of business, despite the existence of the fringe benefits tax. Formal meals of one kind or another occur throughout the year, and accepting the hospitality of others, produces some reciprocal obligations to entertain, which adds to the number of lunches and dinners. By the end of 1997 my wife and I will have entertained to dinner over six years about 1500 people (usually in groups of 12), and we are almost certainly small players in this game. Although I find the sheer frequency of these occasions burdensome, there is no doubt at all that much business is discussed better over food and wine than in their absence. The cost is a loss of cherished family life, a declining interest in eating and drinking for their own sake, and an unending battle with the waistline.

The tally for 1994, a representative year, looked like this (the actual figures are greater in every case — these are the ones organised far enough in advance to have been recorded in the diary):

Absences   Three weeks recreation leave, 19 other absences from Canberra, four of them (30 days in all) overseas (two of them for the Commonwealth)

Scheduled committee meetings   139 committee meetings, 88 within the university, 37 of higher education bodies, 14 of local bodies

Appointments with individuals or groups   378, of which 176 were with staff, 27 with students, 53 with deputy vice-chancellors and 38 with deans; of the 74 appointments with people external to the university, 62 occurred on campus; there were scores of other meetings which did not get recorded in the diary

Speeches   50, plus 16 TV and radio appearances on short notice

Functions   I opened, closed or otherwise participated in 17 functions held in the university and 32 outside it

Eating and drinking   143 lunches and dinners, in about equal numbers

I am not one of those vice-chancellors who try to maintain their scholarly or research interests, or even one of the few who try to teach regularly.   The demands of the job, and of my interest in defending the cause of higher education generally, are simply too great, at least for me. Also missing from the 1994 tally is any time regularly set aside for reading, reflection and recreation, though I now put it in the diary and sometimes gain it. Long plane flights give me time to read books. I do not claim that this workload is exceptional, indeed I would guess that it is about par for the course. What it says is that vice-chancellors are extraordinarily busy people. I have only hinted at the workload for the vice-chancellor's partner, who also has to be married to the job or to insist from the beginning that he/she has a separate life and career and cannot be assumed to be available for this or that. The thanks we give our partners are heartfelt and never perfunctory. It continues to amaze me that they put up with the demands placed upon them.

When we allocate our time this way, what in fact is happening? Here I turn to Friedrich, whose simple approach to political processes and functions helped me clear my mind 25 years ago about how to explain politics to 18 year olds. The categories still seem sensible to me, though I've grouped together separate chapter headings and trimmed them for my purposes; some themes, as in the book itself, skip along from heading to heading. I need to stress that what follows is not intended as a commentary on Friedrich. I simply need a structure that comes from the field of political science, and one that I am happy with. My comments serve as much to account for the modern university itself as to account for what this vice-chancellor does, and they allow me in passing to offer what is no doubt completely gratuitous advice to those thinking about such a career.

Ideas, Ideologies, Myths and Symbols (Chapters 4 and 5)

Universities abound in these intellectual products, and each university has its own 'legend', both in the sense used by Russel Ward — 'a people's idea of itself ...[which] is always connected to reality' (Ward, 1966, 1) and in the sense used by John le Carre in *Smiley's People* — a constructed story intended to serve a purpose. A vice-chancellor plays an important part in the retailing of the legend, and reshaping it to serve contemporary purposes; he or she needs to be sensitive to the ideas and values embodied in the legend and to their emotional force. At their best these legends are the cement that at various times has held universities together against the state, society and even students. Especially in the late 1990s university staff need to feel that there is a light at the end of the tunnel other than the headlight of a train coming the other way. Myths and legends, symbols, ideas and ideologies give intellectual and emotional reassurance that there is a proper and honourable place for the university in a world that often seems short-sighted, materialistic and ungenerous. At their worst they can have an acid quality that leads to division and destruction, and makes the university a miserable place to work. Some of a vice-chancellor's speaking time involves adding to the university's stock of myths and symbols by using prevailing ideas and ideologies to weave new responses into the old fabric. It is important to be consistent and coherent. Above all, it is important to believe in the product. You will be called upon to speak without notice on many occasions when just such material is needed, and you cannot do it convincingly unless you believe in it yourself. Appointment as a vice-chancellor involves the learning and acquisition of the university's stock of these stories and values, because to try to impose new directions without awareness of the university's history is to invite early failure.

Rational Conduct, Organisation and Political Style (Chapter 7)

A vice-chancellor needs to appear rational, whatever the reality, as well as coherent and consistent. There is an honoured place for the eccentric academic (if not too eccentric, or eccentric to too many colleagues); I know of no such place for the eccentric vice-chancellor. A great deal of the university's daily business has to be done in an orderly and predictable way, and in this domain the vice-chancellor needs to appear businesslike, calm and far-sighted. Although universities are popularly judged in terms of age, status, TER levels and the rest, in more select circles they are judged in terms of how well they seem to be run, the apparent efficiency of their organisation, and the political style of the vice-chancellor. Anthony Trollope said somewhere (in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, I think), that a reforming Anglican clergyman had to be utterly unexceptional in the nature of his family life, whereas a clergyman could lead an uproarious personal life provided he kept rigidly to the 39 articles. A vice-chancellor can be in favour of anything, and support any cause, even the least popular, provided that the university runs well and pays its bills promptly.

The Dimensions of Political Community (Chapter 8)

I sometimes refer to my own university as an Italian renaissance town of 10,000 souls, extraordinarily creative, effervescent and productive, but occasionally inclined to lapse into backstreet brawls and character

assassination. I have the honour to be its Mayor. The key point is that like the town, the university is a political community, and it is most important that the Mayor is seen out and about in the town, not shut away in the office. The students are potentially part of the community, especially those 1100 or so who, like me, live on campus, but most of them stand aloof. Australian students have an instrumental view of higher education: it is the pathway to a good or better job. If it delivers, then it has done its job. I spend a good deal of time with the student representatives on my campus, the great majority of whom have been splendid leaders if indifferent students. I am resigned to the knowledge that most of the rest of the students are aware neither of my name nor of what I do.

The politics of the town is partly built around the production and export business, which is educating people for the professions, partly about the distribution of tribute (the DEETYA money), and partly about the allocation of prestige and honour (appointments, promotions and elections). The town is organised around guilds (faculties and schools) which are both complementary and in daily competition in the marketplace. The most important task of the vice-chancellor is to keep this competition at a healthy level and to build from it a strong commitment to the university itself. That doesn't sound especially easy, and isn't easy in fact. The external environment can be a help (some competition from other institutions is useful) but even then the task of building commitment to the institution consumes much of one's time. Academics have portable skills, and the best known of them are usually in demand; that is increasingly true of good general staff. They have to feel good about the place, and to feel also that their contribution to it is not only important but is seen to be important. So the three great priorities for a vice-chancellor are 'communicate, communicate and communicate!' It is probably not necessary to say so, but communication means listening as well as talking.

Power, Rule and Leadership (Chapters 9 and 10)

Vice-chancellors can be Leaders, Managers or Chairs. They don't rule — at least, none known to me rules. My own view is that in the late 1990s they have to be Leaders; they should have excellent managers working to them, and leave university management to the managers. Vice-chancellors who are Chairs belong to a past era, when universities were small, highly regulated, financially secure and peripheral in our society. Australian universities have both a strong managerial tradition and a strong collegial rhetoric, and the two are always potentially in conflict. On the whole, collegiality operates to stop things happening rather than to prompt innovations, so a vice-chancellor looks for managerial levers to get things done. These levers lie in the power of the budget, the power of imagination and the increasing general expectation that a vice-chancellor is there to do things. Much of the budget is already fixed, given tenure and the difficulty of changing courses in midstream, so the capacity to use the budget as an instrument of change is marginal only. But it is usually enough, since universities do not have the time, energy or human resources to do many new things at the one time.

Now is the time to repeat that if a vice-chancellor spends a lot of time building and nurturing the university as a political community he or she will find it easier to appeal to that community for support for new ventures, or for

necessary but unpleasant changes. There is power simply in the office, but it will not take you very far by itself.

Influence, Anticipated Reactions and Legitimacy (Chapters 11 and 12)

The political community's sense of itself, its purpose and its future are not something that a vice-chancellor can play with at will. As I have said, the university's legend and its attendant symbols and language come from the past and to some extent the vice-chancellor will be captive to them. But it is always possible (indeed necessary) to adapt, and the shocks which universities have experienced in the last ten years have given opportunity to vice-chancellors to redefine what their universities are for, and to make decisions which are in harmony with that redefinition. If that is done well there will develop a feeling that the changes are legitimate, and many people will begin to adapt their behaviour to the redefined mission. Leadership thus becomes a mixture of steering hard and cheering up. It is important (another repeat) to believe in the direction, and (I say it without malice) somewhat unkind to the crew to set the compass and then leave the boat suddenly to steer another one, perhaps larger or older.

Political Representation and Responsibility (Chapter 17)

Universities have complex systems of representation — at least for academic staff and academic concerns; general staff are much less well catered for. Making the committee system work well is another of the vice-chancellor's important concerns, for if important issues get into a familiar languid feedback loop (Academic Board to Board committee to Faculty Board to Faculty Board committee to Academic Board committee, and back to Academic Board) the forward direction of the university can falter. To my mind putting great emphasis on changing structures is on the whole an error: structural change should come at the end, not at the beginning, because it consumes enormous amounts of time and energy without much profit. Any well-known human organisational form can be made to work well if those working inside it know what they are doing and why doing it is important — and, to repeat, they feel valued for playing their part. That is why vice-chancellors need to put their energy into being leaders, not managers.

My own preference is to have the flattest organisational structure possible and to treat staff as professionals who will work best if they feel trusted to be responsible. Ideally, one tries to build up the confidence and capacity of one's staff so that they can act as professionals in the fullest sense of that word. Of course, there is a downside: for example, fewer of my staff than I would wish involve students in the assessment of their teaching; but there are costs whatever you do. Monitoring everybody is expensive, and probably leads to lower levels of productivity all round.

Bureaucracy, Order and Participation (Chapters 18-20)

There has to be a university bureaucracy, and if there weren't one academics would set one up right away. I have had strong sympathy with the public servants in all four of my universities. They were often criticised (outrageously so in one university), sometimes for simply doing what they were supposed to be doing — tasks which had been laid down by an earlier

generation of academics. They are sometimes treated as inferiors by academics, many of whom have a short memory for policy matters, and little idea of the administrative consequences of what they will see as a quite simple proposal, dismissing as unimportant the extra work that will be involved (and claiming that too much is already spent on administration). Worse, some academics take no notice of quite formal rules, for example the need to fill in a sick leave form after being away sick. Unlike general staff, academics seem rarely to be sick, a phenomenon that intrigues auditor-generals in every state. Only a small proportion of academics in any university is prepared to put in the time necessary to play a citizen's role in the university's governance. It is hard to blame them: administration has low status in the academic pantheon, and is grudgingly valued in promotion criteria, while everyone, from the vice-chancellor down, feels overworked.

From time to time it seems to me that — to change from the nautical metaphor — the university is the last vestige of cottage industry, with hundreds of hand-loom weavers busily producing their product without much awareness of the building they work in, let alone of the approach of mechanisation in the form of IT. As business people can be heard to complain, academics come to meetings to find out what is going on, not really to participate in a serious discussion of the issues or to make a decision. The patience and good humour of the best general staff, given all this, is exemplary. Vice-chancellors come to work closely with the senior general staff, and all recognise their value and dedication.

Political Innovation and Invention (Chapter 21)

Having said all that, I feel it important also to say that vice-chancellors need to be able to change old administrative practices, and should not regard the administrative legacy of the past as having the force of Mosaic tablets. A lot of what we do in universities should be seen as practices which had a sensible rationale in the time that they were established; but they are not 'principles'. Contact hours, teaching methods, administrative procedures, assessment rules — all are obvious examples. Perhaps more subtly, the notion that universities should be self-contained communities, able to supply basic needs from their own stores and services, is plainly an inheritance from a past when these goods and services were often hard to come by. Since that is not our current situation, we need to be sure that what we are doing makes sense in today's terms.

Since most people like change only when they are in charge of it themselves (and there is a cost even then), procedures and practices tend to hang on, and if the vice-chancellor doesn't act, or support a new senior colleague who sees the need to act, then nothing much will happen, since these procedures and practices are usually university-wide in their effect.

Founding the Political Order (Chapter 22)

A founding vice-chancellor has a large and mostly clean canvas on which to paint his or her vision, and thereby to create the founding legend. Appointments to such posts are attended with even more significance than usual. Although the set of faculties and academic activities with which the new university begins will already have been largely decided on by others,

the values, aspirations, practices and procedures that will guide staff and students will have to be laid down, and there the founding vice-chancellor will have an enormous capacity to make an impact. That will also be true in part for succeeding vice-chancellors who come to the office at a time of rebirth — after an amalgamation, for example.

Defending and Expanding the Political Community (Chapter 23)

The vice-chancellor is not only the Prime Minister but the Minister for Foreign Affairs as well. No-one else can speak so authoritatively for the university, and speaking out is most important. Universities need defending, especially now, and they need blending, too: they have become too important to humanity to be distinguished as somehow 'different' (as in 'town and gown'). I try very hard to make my university among other things the university of my town (there are other possible choices for this role), and I do that in all sorts of ways, mostly through speaking and acting out in the community of the town. Once again, none of these activities is unimportant, whatever an outsider might think. There is something short of an infinity of choices about where to speak and what to do, and the amount of time available for this kind of representation is limited; the vice-chancellor's choices should be consistent and coherent. I am not a particularly acquisitive person by temperament, and I am not interested in expanding my university through amalgamations or takeovers. But if I were, then the foreign affairs role would be crucial — much of that activity necessarily takes place in the world outside the university, and the vice-chancellor legitimates the university's new ventures by introducing them to the world.

Part of the defence of the university lies in the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, which is the closest higher education in Australia comes to having a national champion, and all vice-chancellors are members of it. Because we have divergent as well as common interests it is all too frequently the case that the necessary defence is lacking. Governments and unions regard the AVCC as ineffective and little more than a talk-shop. It has to be remembered, however, that the AVCC is not a peak body and has no capacity to discipline its members — vice-chancellors are individually responsible to their governing bodies, not to the Board of the AVCC. Those who lament the absence of strong and effective action by the AVCC in the interests of universities need to be aware of the handicaps under which it operates.

Rules, the Settling of Disputes, and Taking Measures (Chapters 24-26)

You could call all this 'making it work'. As one (male) mentor once explained to me, a vice-chancellor can do nothing by himself: he has to work through other people, and they have to believe in what the vice-chancellor believes in. While a lot of that is leadership in the large, it is also, and most importantly, leadership close up. All universities have a corporate management group, and the vice-chancellor must lead it as well as decide who belongs to it. The vice-chancellorship is not a one-person kayak. It has to include a lot of other people, who exercise the delegated powers of the vice-chancellor and are responsible to the vice-chancellor for the way they exercise that power. Bringing them together effectively, building them into a team, farewelling the

old and introducing the new members, keeping spirits up, keeping everybody well informed, sorting out territory, making sure that equity rules OK, not maintaining a court or playing favourites — that is the task here. It is a daily task, and one that can never be neglected. For most practical purposes, as Weber argued, it is better to establish working rules to deal with these matters than to have to solve them through the person of the leader, and the rules should be sensible enough to continue to operate when the vice-chancellor has been replaced — at least until the new one has come to some firm decisions about the way the university should operate. But the vice-chancellor has to be serious about the working rules, and they need to apply personally as well as to others.

Negotiating a Political Bargain (Chapter 27)

None of us has been trained for enterprise bargaining. I simply detest it, because the resulting fragmentation of the university, into unions and 'management', into the separate unions themselves, and into union members and non-members, vitiates all the work I do to build up the spirit of community. Not only that, I find that in negotiating I have at least one arm tied behind my back: unions can and do behave at times intemperately, irresponsibly and without regard to truth or facts. My whole preparation for my role has been as an academic, trained to behave rationally, to seek the facts and the truth, and not to lose my temper (I have done so, and hate the loss of control so exhibited). If any one change in the past seven years has made my working life decidedly less enjoyable, it is this. It is made still worse by the fact that, as other vice-chancellors would also say, the issues in the bargaining are rarely local ones, but those determined outside the university. Were we at UC able to construct a bargain without interference from outside I think we could do it seriously, effectively and reasonably quickly. We do similar things all the time — indeed, from one perspective much of what a vice-chancellor does every day is to negotiate. Outside the area where no-one wants to make a decision, and the question flies unerringly to the vice-chancellor's table (what to do about the awful things that happen — suicides, other deaths, rapes, and so on), the great majority of issues within the university have to be dealt with through negotiation, not through issuing orders. Negotiation will proceed smoothly and briskly if the other matters addressed above have been attended to.

Succession (Chapter 28)

Since vice-chancellors have shortish terms, and since they can only work effectively through other people, it follows that a most important part of their work is choosing senior people, and thereby ensuring that the question of succession is handled sensitively and well. Once again, the question of the university's needs, not simply the needs of the area whose dean or professor is being appointed, is a matter for the vice-chancellor. My own preference is for people who will devote themselves to the needs of the university, rather than to their own greater glory; I recognise that this is not a universal preference, but it has seemed important to me, and I think that it has worked. So I look for people skills, a capacity to think large, an interest in other things than one's own discipline, a liking for teaching and for students, a capacity to work well with others. I put a high weighting on these components, and rather less on the applicant's being or becoming a great name in his or her

discipline or area. Since my university is a smallish one, I have to recognise that some of my best people will need to leave in order to go upwards; helping them to do that to their advantage seems to me to be an important aspect of the vice-chancellor's role.

Finally, and again in part because we are small, and every person counts, I think it is important that the university have an excellent deputy vice-chancellor. The job is too large now for any one person to occupy it successfully, and a first-class deputy takes a share of the work, stands in the for the vice-chancellor when the latter is on leave or busy doing something else that is important, provides another point of view when decisions are being made, and acts as another point of access. Should the vice-chancellor suffer the melancholy Australian fate of going under a bus the deputy can act effectively in the role while a successor is being chosen. It is properly tidy-minded to make sure that one has such a deputy, and I have always done so. It is also important to add that I avoid buses.

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It is hard to end a discursive account like this with a satisfying summary. I have not tried to set out the details of the myriad activities that the job entails, because I think that would be boring. What I have done is to set down my own perspective on the contemporary university, and on my own role as a vice-chancellor. The two are of course related. I do not at all claim that my way is the best way, but only that I have come to it after a long time in the business of higher education, and that it seems to work in my own place. Whether or not it would work somewhere else is a matter for others to decide.

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